



ONE DIET DOES NOT FIT ALL – PART I

Our society is known for its quick fix desires, whether it is the miracle of duct tape or the reliance on spell check, weight loss diets lead the way in quick fix promises.

When it comes to weight loss, people do some crazy things. They often ask folks who are struggling with obesity themselves for diet advice. It would make more sense to talk to a health professional or at the very least ask someone who does not appear to have a weight problem what he or she does to stay in shape. The common assumption that people are just “naturally that way” is almost always false.

This is Part I of a two-part article exploring low carbohydrate diets, like Atkins, which have been around for decades. The best thing about this diet is that most people cannot stay on it long enough to do damage! When people exclude carbohydrates from their diet, they will immediately experience a water loss. Dieters are excited because they have just lost four pounds in two days while eating prime rib, bacon, and eggs.

Unfortunately, 64 ounces of water weighs 4 pounds and represents a calorie deficit of zero. A steady weight loss of 4 pounds over as many weeks is likely the result of burning 14,000 calories that were once stored as fat. It is impossible for a person to manage a 14,000 calorie deficit over two days. A diet like Atkins tends to be too high in saturated fat (the kind that raises LDL cholesterol) and too low in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, all of which contain fiber and phytonutrients which are known to decrease the risk of certain diseases, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and several types of cancer.

The original low fat diet approach where people ate lean meats, whole grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables was a healthy diet lacking in processed junk foods. In the early days, there was not a bounty of fat free pretzels or fat free cookies and jelly beans were not considered a “free food.” Then the food industry got involved it wasn’t long before fat free cookies replaced oranges, a serving of white rice took on the proportions of snow capped mountains and everyone was sucking down fat free jelly beans. The result was too many junky calories, too little fiber, and no heart healthy fat, a combination that did not provide a feeling of satiety. This diet might work for ironman triathletes who need to eat all of the time and get more than 60% of their calories from carbohydrate, but for the rest of sedentary, overweight America this became the recipe for over eating, high triglycerides, low HDL, and disappointing weight loss.

Would some people be better off eating less carbohydrate? Insulin resistance is a condition that increases the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease. It often develops when a person becomes overweight and/or sedentary. Individuals who have insulin resistance (about 5% of adults who are not overweight, 25% of adults who are overweight, and close to 50% of adults who are obese) may fare better on a diet lower in carbohydrate than a marathon runner. However, the very low carbohydrate levels of the early phases of the Atkins diet and the liberal promotion of foods high in saturated fat goes against decades of research in cancer and cardiovascular disease prevention.

Could the Atkins diet be modified to be healthier? Part II of this article will address this question and further discuss issues surrounding low carbohydrate diets.

If you need help to improve your eating habits and prevent weight gain, *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*TM can help. Contact your local base Health and Wellness Center

(HAWC) or Dietitian for more information or visit the *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!™* community website at <http://airforcemedicine.afms.mil/shapeyourfuture>.

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